

Annual Report 2016

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge



Photograph by Abby Boling

Valle de Oro NWR: Big Steps Forward in 2016

It's hard to imagine that less than five years ago Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was just an idea in the hearts and minds of our neighbors. Recognizing the need to connect urban audiences with wild places, and to build the next generation of conservation minded citizens and conservation professionals, the community came together to build Valle de Oro NWR in just five years. It is now a part of a network of over 100 refuges nationwide identified as Urban Wildlife Refuges, and the first in the nation to be built from the ground up using the Urban Standards of Excellence.

As I look back, I am in awe of all that has happened in such a short amount of time. More so, I am inspired by the people that made this bold idea a reality and who have fostered our growth and ensured our alignment with both community and conservation ethics.

Over the years we have been able to celebrate several organizational milestones. Through a consortium of federal, state, and local partners we competed the land acquisition (2014) and all associated water rights (2015). We grew from a staff of one in 2013 to five dedicated people in 2016. We also reached programmatic milestones like increasing our annual youth employment to 100 individuals a year, participating in over 85 events on and off Refuge lands, and integrating diverse ways of collaborating and interacting with our community—from art performances to environmental justice summits.

In 2016, Valle de Oro NWR became one of four refuges in the nation to receive a \$1 million increase to our base budget, and was recognized for our impact in the community led conservation movement. This achievement was a validation of all the hard work and dedication our Refuge family had poured into this project from the beginning.

As I look to the future, I can't help but be excited, energized, and a bit curious about what is to come for our community Refuge. I can't wait to see the new faces of the people and wildlife that call this Refuge their own.

Jennifer Owen-White

Your Refuge Manager Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

In March 2016, Dan Ashe of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that Valle de Oro NWR would join the ranks of three other refuges, each receiving an annual \$1 million dollar boost to their budgets in perpetuity.







Brief Background

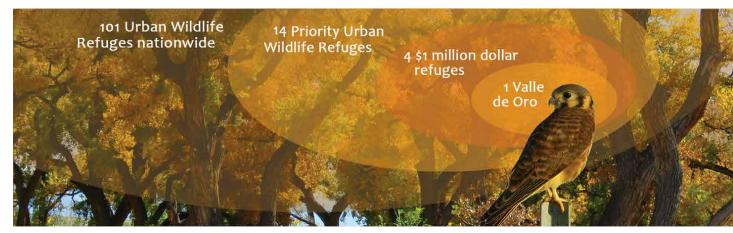
About the Refuge

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge is the Southwest's first Urban Wildlife Refuge. Designated in 2012, the 570-acre property focuses on wildlife and habitat restoration and deepening connections between people, especially young people, and the natural world. Created from land that was once a long-standing dairy farm, it is located just seven miles south of downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico's largest metropolitan area, accessible to over 60 percent of the state's population.

As part of the National Wildlife Refuge System—a national network of lands and waters managed for the benefit of wildlife, habitat and people—Valle de Oro NWR is both connected to wildlife habitats across the country and rooted in our local community. Valle de Oro NWR creates a gateway for urban dwellers to connect with the broader conservation community, building engagement and support for the protection and conservation of lands beyond Albuquerque.

About the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program

Created by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this program works to garner broad support for conservation, providing a reason and opportunities for urban residents to find, appreciate, and care for nature in their cities and beyond. The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program focuses on engaging urban neighbors and fostering a sense of stewardship. The program consists of three components: Urban Refuges, of which there are 101 total, 14 of which are considered Priority Urban Refuges; Urban Refuge Partnerships; and Urban Bird Treaty Cities. Valle de Oro NWR is proudly classified under all three designations. For more information visit www.fws.gov/urban.



Photograph details by D. Nichols and D. Johnson

Event Highlights 2016

Golden Migration

In partnership with 516 ARTS, muralist Chip Thomas and choreographer and dancer Lisa Nevada created a performance/installation piece at the Refuge focusing on climate change, the environment, and community engagement.

Music and Migration

This event welcomed 460+ people, offering picnicking, live music, migratory bird watching, and nature walks. The Refuge partnered with Wings for Life, a local nonprofit supporting community members with incarcerated family members, providing a space to enjoy nature together.

Abrazos: A Celebration of Environmental Justice

With help from 20 partners, the Refuge provided 400 community members with free food, live music, and tours of the Mountain View neighborhood, highlighting environmental injustices.

Valle de Oro NWR Turned 4!

The Refuge celebrated with 52 partners and over 750 community members in attendance in 2016.

Mountain View Field Day

The Refuge hosted the entire student body of Mountain View Elementary for a day of fun educational nature activities and field games.



Standards of Excellence

Valle de Oro NWR is the first refuge to be built from the ground up using the Urban Standards of Excellence. While other refuges have incorporated them retroactively, we have built our foundation with these standards, using them to guide all aspects of our work in habitat planning, biology, outreach, education programs, and partnerships.

We are proud to model these principles for future urban refuges, bringing these standards to life in innovative ways. Our guiding principles are:

- Know and relate to the community
- Connect urban people with nature via stepping stones of engagement
- Build partnerships
- Be a community asset

- Ensure adequate long-term resources
- Provide equitable access
- Ensure visitors feel safe and welcome
- Model sustainability

Visitation and Program Highlights

Youth Engagement

Our partnerships with youth employment organizations include: La Plazita Institute, Southwest Conservation Corps, Conservation Legacy, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, and the Federal and New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps.

The Refuge hosts the Middle Rio Grande Urban Conservation Corps program, which provides diverse work experience on public lands, including life skill training, natural resource education, and a conservation career mentoring and is collaboratively funded by multiple federal agencies. Valle de Oro NWR hosts and supports the Merge Alliance (MRG E3), an organization that encourages collaboration between organizations who work in environmental education, youth employment, and outdoor recreation in the Albuquerque area.

"Partnering with Valle de Oro NWR has allowed us to serve a huge number of New Mexico's youth. Our crews work to complete meaningful conservation and education projects at the Refuge and throughout the region. Valle de Oro NWR is a magnet for New Mexico's conservation professionals, and our youth crew members get to interact with them every day, opening their eyes to new opportunities."

- Jordan Stone

Director Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Middle Rio Grande Office "Valle de Oro NWR has not only inspired me to choose a career path that benefits the natural environment and its people, but has also taught me to thrive in my community and to reach for my goals in pursuing higher education. Valle de Oro NWR has been a family to me—I could never thank everyone enough. I am who I am today because of the influence the Refuge and all involved have had on me."

- Makenzie Sanchez

Youth Conservation Corps Crew Member, Youth Ambassador and Former Intern

5,986 people participated in Environmental Education programs

6,305 people visited Valle de Oro NWR

4,035 people participated ir interpretive programs and tours

23 special events held

3,254 people participated in special events

5,998 volunteer hours donated

189 volunteers engaged

100 local youth employed through Conservation Corps

Staff List 2016

In 2016 our Refuge team grew...

Jennifer Owen-White*
Wildlife Refuge Manager

Melanie Dabovich* Administrative Officer

Teresa Skiba*
Education Specialist

Ariel Elliott*
Wildlife Biologist

Joseph Mackey* Maintenance Worker

Maintenance Worker

Hannah Redwood Student Conservation Association Environmental Education Intern

Antonio Valdes-Dapena DOI AmeriCorps VISTA Community Engagement Intern

Amelia Murphy
Social Science Research Contractor

Leandra Taylor

Photograph by Wyatt Lane. (Pictured left-right) Teresa Skiba, Hannah Redwood, Amelia Murphy, Antonio Valdes-Dapena, Leandra Taylor, Ariel Elliott, Melanie Dabovich, Jennifer Owen-White, Joseph Mackey, Wren Walraven, Wezil Walraven

> DOI AmeriCorps VISTA MRG E₃ Alliance Coordinator

Jessica Allen

AmeriCorps Intern Phenology Trail Coordinator

Wren Walraven Wezil Walraven Resident Volunteers

*permanent staff

Environmental Education

Valle de Oro NWR is committed to providing quality, in-depth environmental education, citizen science, and service learning opportunities for middle and high school youth. Our partners include: The Environmental Education Association of New Mexico, Audubon NM, Earth Force, Nature's Notebook (a program of the National Phenology Network), and The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program.





Key Partnerships

Partners continue to support the Refuge's wildlife management and conservation mission in many enriching ways. Some of the vital partnerships supported through this year's Urban Wildlife Conservation program funding are:

Mountain View Community Center, Bernalillo County, & Dimensions Educational Research worked collaboratively over the year to establish the new Nature Explore Classroom at the Mountain View Community Center.

The Mountain View Neighborhood Association advocates for environmental justice, working closely with the Refuge to address challenges.

Los Jardines Institute in the South Valley strives to build and support healthy and sustainable communities and workplaces through land-based methods.

AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America, Southwest Conservation Corps, & La Plazita Barrio Youth Corps, funded under the umbrella of Conservation Legacy, are committed to engaging young Americans in service to conserve and protect our communities and ecosystems.

The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps inspires young adults to make a positive difference in their lives and communities through training and service.

The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program & The Phenology Trail Network work with hundreds of citizen science students at the Refuge to collect valuable data for publications and policy.

The Environmental Education Association of NM enhances environmental education by providing professional development and partnerships.

Audubon New Mexico works to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and biological diversity.

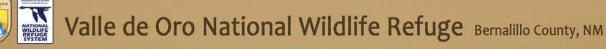
Earth Force engages youth as environmental citizens, building strong community partnerships and making decisions as a democratic group.

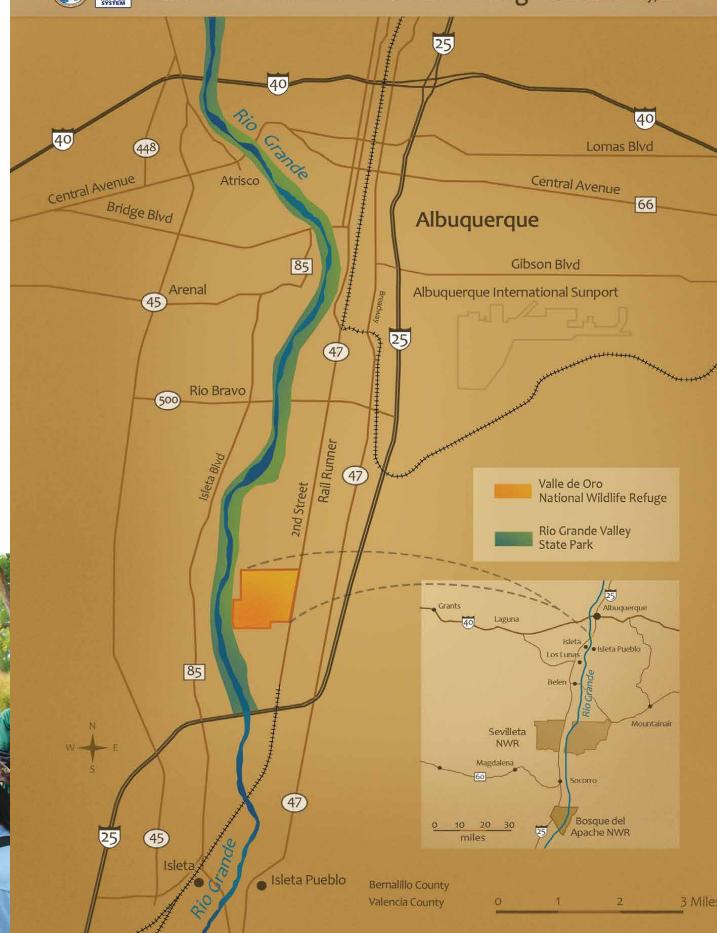
And most importantly, our **Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge** non-profit support group who assist in the realization of our overall vision and help establish the Refuge as a community resource.

Find a full list at: www.fws.gov/refuge/Valle_de
Oro/what we do/partnerships.html

Bureau of Indian Affairs director Michael Black joins members of the Native American Youth Corps from La Pazita Institute to learn about bird banding at the Refuge's banding station run by Rio Grande Bird Research.







Important Milestones

Accomplished together with our Refuge staff, Friends of Valle de Oro, partners and community members:

2010: Bernalillo County, along with the Trust for Public Land, appropriated initial funding to help purchase Valley Gold Farms

2012: Established Friends organization

2012: USFWS, along with AMAFCA, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, contributed funding to complete the 1st phase of land acquisition

2012: Designated as the Southwest's 1st Urban Wildlife Refuge and nation's 559th Refuge

2013: Friends registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit and conducted 1st membership drive

2013: Jennifer Owen-White appointed as Refuge Manager

2013: Established as EPA Urban Waters Federal Partnership site

2013: Hosted 1st National Public Lands Day and Refuge's 1st public design workshop

2013: Recognized as 1 of 8 Urban Refuge Partnership Sites in the nation

2013: Met with stakeholders for 1st habitat restoration design charrette

2014: Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program site established at the Refuge

2014: Friends hosted 1st annual Meeting of Membership

2014: Held first and second public meetings to solicit ideas for Refuge design

2014: Developed partnership with La Plazita Institute and SW Conservation Corps in support of Native American Youth Corps

2014: Refuge Youth Conservation Corps summer employment program begins

2014: Refuge partners with Audubon NM for 1st environmental education curriculum: Birds of a Feather Explore Together

2014: Held first workshops for visitors center design and interpretive messaging

2014: Hosted 1st annual Mountain View Elementary School field day at the Refuge

2014: Friends developed five-year Strategic Plan

2014: Completed land acquisition for a total of 570 acres of property

2014: Rocky Mountain Youth Corps moved in as 1st co-located partner

2014: Partnered with the City of Albuquerque in its designation as the 20th Urban Bird Treaty City

2014: Hosted 1st annual Music & Migration event

2014: Partnered with Bernalillo County for 2nd St. Improvement Project. Awarded \$12.5M from Federal Lands Access Program

2015: Hosted Talking Talons Next Generation Conservationist Career Fair

2015: Friends traveled to Washington D.C. to advocate for Refuge funding

2015: Began developing Environmental Justice Strategic Plan with partners

2015: Hosted 1st annual Environmental Justice Community Day with partners

2015: Friends received EPA grant to survey Mountain View neighborhood for Environmental & Economic Justice Strategic Plan

2015: Friends established 1st annual Golden Gala Fundraiser

2015: Friends received the Outstanding Citizen's Award from Bernalillo County

2015: Established the Middle Rio Grande Urban Conservation Corps with NPS, USFS, BIA and other federal partners

2015: Established 1st annual A.R.T.S. event and founded the Burque Young Birders Club

2016: Friends received bus and tram donations for visitors and Refuge access programs

2016: Started development of Refuge Strategic Plan, called A Logic Model

2016: Launched the "Life Along the Rio Grande" education program in partnership with Gutierrez-Hubbell House and Bernalillo County

2016: Launched the Birding & Breakfast program at the Refuge

2016: Friends developed contract with Discover Nature Apps to create site-specific phone app for the Refuge

2016: Friends and Refuge formed respective Valle de Oro Visitor Center Committees

2016: Hired Aryn LaBrake as 1st Executive Director for the Friends

2016: Friends designed and funded Refuge bus wrap with youth artwork

2016: \$3.4 million acquired for the Refuge's future visitor center

2016: Started work on Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan





Photograph by Laurel Ladwig

"The Community's Refuge"

In 2011, the South Valley community organized a grassroots effort to preserve the former Price's Dairy property as green space for wildlife and future generations. These engaged community members later became the Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge.

The Friends group is a pioneering force in many ways. We formed before the Refuge—an exceptional circumstance—and played a significant role in the funding and acquisition of the property. Through hard work, persistence, and vision, we worked alongside the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and local partners to create the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). In those early years, the Friends acted as Refuge staff, conducting outreach and hosting events, forging partnerships, supporting environmental education, fundraising, and involving the greater community in visualizing and shaping "their" Refuge. Valle de Oro NWR is the first Urban National Wildlife Refuge in the Southwest region, and it is the first to develop from the ground up under the new USFWS's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program.

We are extremely proud of our humble beginnings and enjoy serving as role model for future Urban Refuge development. Our work illustrates how community can unite under the common goals of protecting the natural environment and creating a resource for both wildlife and people. The USFWS recently recognized our work with the 2016 Southwest Region Friends Group of the Year Award.

The Friends and USFWS operate under a formal agreement to achieve our mutual conservation and community engagement goals. The revision of that agreement in 2016 served as a wonderful orientation exercise for the Friends' first staff member. With Aryn LaBrake hired as our Executive Director, we were able to significantly increase our capacity to support the Refuge staff and the efforts of our hard-working board of directors and volunteers.

Valle de Oro NWR is an extraordinary project and its success is due to the efforts of many individuals and organizations, local and government agencies, and federal partners. This annual report not only highlights the numbers, but measures our social and environmental impact as well. Our hope is to inspire you to become involved in shaping and supporting the Refuge's unique model of collaboration, community involvement, and the future of conservation.

In Gratitude,

The Friends Leadership Team



2016 Program Highlights

Modeling a new era of community-engaged conservation

- Funded and helped create the Discover Valle de Oro Nature App, allowing visitors to interact with the Refuge's flora and fauna in fun and engaging ways.
- Developed and launched the Life Along the Rio Grande environmental and cultural education program for middle and high school students, in partnership with Valle de Oro NWR, Bernalillo County, and the Gutierrez-Hubbell House, which served 500 students in 2016.
- Donated a 20-passenger shuttle bus to the Refuge. Involved local students in creating artwork for the shuttle wrap, featuring wildlife commonly found at the Refuge.
- Supported the committee that toured relevant facilities and gathered community input for the future Valle de Oro NWR visitor and community engagement complex.
- Collaborated with Los Jardines Institute to identify community needs and challenges in preparation for the forthcoming Environmental and Economic Justice Strategic Plan.
- Launched a new Triple Bottom Line Project to better share stories of our progress and success, measuring the wider impact of connecting people, the planet, and prosperity.



Photograph by Deanna Nichols

Next Steps...

Apply Community Input

Use the results from the Los Jardines Institute Survey to inform the Valle de Oro NWR Environmental and Economic Justice Strategic Plan (EEJSP)—the first in the nation of its kind developed for a public land site.

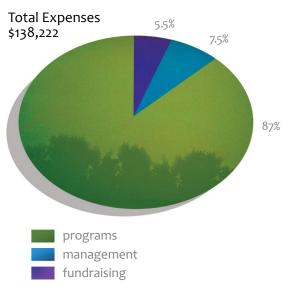
Plan Strategically

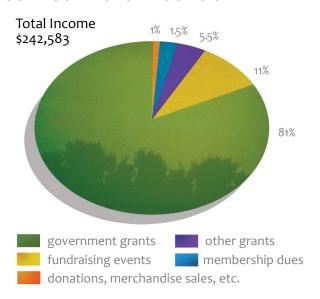
Reevaluate the Friends of Valle de Oro NWR's strategic plan, goals and tasks, solidify our brand and message, and—most importantly—build our outreach capacity. Increase membership and volunteer numbers, as they are treasured assets and incredible ambassadors for the Refuge.

Fundraise

Move forward with the Refuge's visitor center construction and habitat restoration, scheduled to begin in 2018. Ramp up efforts to support the Refuge through grant writing and fundraising.

Friends of Valle de Oro NWR Fiscal Year 2016 Breakdown





Environmental Outcomes - Refuge Development Activities

570 acres of farmland protected after final land acquisition

2 tons of trash collected on volunteer clean-up days

Social Outcomes - Educational Activities

4,035 people reached through interpretive programs and tours

\$41,000 contributed to develop Refuge education and interpretive program

2,460 students transported with \$14,000 in bus funding

600 hrs donated by EE volunteers worth \$14,100

Social Outcomes - Membership and Outreach

\$65,900 of in-kind contributions in over 2,800 hours of time contributed by over 40 volunteers

\$3,775 in membership fees contributed to programs 3,254 people reached through more than 23 outreach events

Social Outcomes - Community Engagement

550 local community members engaged in Refuge planning activities

\$25,500 contributed for community engagement and environmental and economic justice programs

Economic Outcomes - Fundraising

1 transport bus donated and wrapped worth \$31,600 \$29,500 raised in events, sales and donations \$209,200 awarded in grants from various foundations and agencies

Economic Outcomes - Investment in the Local Economy

\$6,000 Spent on local food vendors for outreach events

\$13,000 spent in local community on publicity to promote the Refuge



\$4,800 spent for Refuge volunteer and staff support

\$12,900 spent for giveaways, entertainment, and transportation

The **Triple Bottom Line** assesses an organization's relationships and influences in three domains: economic, social and environmental. This metric allows us to track the important outcomes of our various programs and activities.

Friends of Valle de Oro NWR Board of Directors 2016

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Secretary

Abby Boling

Chair of Communications & Marketing Committee

Carol Kline

Chair of Fundraising Committee

John Kwait

Volunteer Coordinator

Ann Hodges

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Alan Marks

Director

Teri Jillson

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Kathy Caffrey

Chair of Education Committee

Cinnamon Weaver

Chair of Events Committee

Deborah Nason

Director

Rorik Rivenburgh

Director



Friends of Valle de Oro NWR Staff 2016

Aryn LaBrake

Executive Director

Aryn LaBrake joined the Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in the fall of 2016 as the Friend's first staff member. Under the director of the board, Aryn is responsible for the overall management and operations of the organization.



Photograph by Ian Shive for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Lifetime Members

Trina Altman Pat Dunkeson Bellelizabeth Foster Teri Jillson Laurel Ladwig Bill Mason

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Friendship Force of New Mexico River of Hope Civitan Club

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Christina Gonzalez

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Patti Plagge Rebecca Purvis Rorik Rivenburgh Maddie Roeber Sue Rouiansky Nadine Scala **Carol Summers** William Tallman Sharon Taylor Sei Tokuda Mary E. Tyler Joyce Van Dellen Adrienne Warner Cinnamon Weaver John Zarola

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Jennifer Predock-Linnell Mary Ramsey

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Abuelitas New Mexican Kitchen Elements Studios, Abby Boling Acme Iron Admiral Beverage The Albert I. Pierce Foundation Albuquerque Community Foundation Environmental Protection Agency Albuquerque Little Theatre Albuquerque Olive Oil Co. **ABQ Sightseeing & Tourism Factory** Albuquerque Youth Archery Club Amazon Smile Donors America Tent Rentals Amrak Enterprises Anonymous Atrisco Heritage Academy Environmantal Stewardship Club Auctioneer Greg Ross B₂B Bistronomy Bernalillo County Commissioner Art de La Cruz Sandy Blalock Diane Bloom The Bosque School Brownstone Events, Nancy Grine Brown Caricatures by Andy Casa Verde Salon and Spa Central New Mexico Audubon Society Central New Mexico Audubon Society, Thursday Birders Chama River Brewing Company Tracy & Steve Colosimo John M. Cornalil DDS Dianne Cress Ginny Crumb Cumulus Media

Dangerous Curvz

Duke City Redi-Mix

East Mountain Centre for Theatre

Teresa D'Anza

Christy Everett **Environmental Education Association** of New Mexico Laura Ferrell Maria Globus Yolanda Griego High Finance/Sandiago's Mexican Grill Ann Hodges Howard Higgins, "Howardini" Jo Huter Independent Vehicle Service Infinite Gesture Fund Jewelers Repair Shop Teri & Chris Jillson Kei & Molly Textiles, LLC Kim Jew Portrait Art Kinney Brick Co. Kirtland Federal Credit Union Carol Kline & Ric Watson Kohls Lisadora, Janice Moranz Karen Lucic & Doug Winblad Jimmy Lujan Alan Marks Millennium Hair Salon, Terrance Burton Minuteman Press Terrie & Doug Moore Mountain View Elementary Students M'tucci's Italian Market & Deli Myers RV National Hispanic Cultural Center National Park Foundation Lannois Neely Northrop Grumman Corp Novidea Salon, Maria Laws

O'Niell's Irish Pub Orona's Ranch Kristen Owenreay Pat's Doors Inc. Piano Source, Judy Boren Cole Raison Richard Prairie Rio Grande Credit Union **Shelley Roberts** Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Judith Roderick Stephanie Ross Mark Rudd & Marla Painter Sandia Laboratory Federal Credit Union Lynn Schuler Sites Southwest Richard Strait Jane and Doug Swift Fund for Art and Education William Tallman The Trust For Public Land U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Villa di Capo Restaurante L.Wren Walraven, Happy Wren Art & Design Cinnamon Weaver Charles Wellborn Wild Birds Unlimited Frederic Wilding White Fred & Pat Wilding-White Wilson & Company

Every effort was made to produce an accurate list of supporter names. If you have a correction or need to update your listing, please contact Aryn LaBrake at aryn@friendsofvalledeoro.org